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SUBJECT: YOK'S NEW COEFFICIENT: MINIMAL BOW TO THE COURT

REF: A. ANKARA 1596

[B.](#) ANKARA 1104

[C.](#) 04 ANKARA 2663

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4(b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Turkey's Higher Education Council (YOK) announced December 17 it would diminish the coefficient used for vocational high school graduates' university entrance scores to an insignificant, almost symbolic number. YOK's new formula keeps the coefficient system in place and therefore abides -- albeit minimally -- by the Council of State's (Danistay) legal decision that removing the coefficient entirely would be unconstitutional. Although the new decision was welcomed by the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) voter base, it also raised concerns from secularists about YOK's politicization, diluted autonomy, and over-sensitivity to pressure from the AKP government. END SUMMARY

YOK's New Plan

12. (U) On December 17, the YOK announced a new plan to address the use of lower coefficients to calculate the university entrance scores of vocational school graduates, as opposed to regular high school graduates. The new plan aims to minimize the point reduction for vocational school students when they apply for university programs outside of their chosen major. The move came in response to the Council of State's (Danistay) November rejection of YOK's appeal after the high court had ruled against the abolition of the coefficient system. Since then, vocational high school students, particularly those attending imam hatip schools, which train Turkey's imams, have been awaiting another solution from YOK.

13. (U) Turkey's centralized education system uses two measures of a student's acumen to assess university acceptance: the grade point average (GPA) and the university entrance exam score. With YOK's new formula, students bidding for university placement in programs within their declared majors will have their GPA's multiplied by a coefficient of 0.15. The same students' GPAs are be multiplied by 0.13 if they apply to programs outside of their majors. Before YOK abolished the use of coefficient regulations, these coefficients were 0.8 and 0.3 respectively. In addition to the coefficient regulation, students who placed in the top 1000 of the nationwide university entrance exam were not subject to the lower coefficient, even if they were chose to apply programs other than their high school majors.

Vocational Schools and the Coefficient Debate

¶4. (SBU) Vocational schools, which include imam hatip schools, are generally the choice of low-income families -- who form a significant portion of the AKP voter base. These schools are designed for youths who hope to join the workforce soon after they graduate, to earn money quickly for their family and to fill gaps in the workforce with their technical skills. Vocational schools' curricula are designed to meet demand by developing precisely these technical skills. In these programs, general non-technical high school subjects are offered only as electives.

¶5. (SBU) Secularist defenders of the coefficient system contend it was designed to create an incentive for vocational students to apply for university-level degrees related to their technical expertise, to fill job openings for workers with specialized and technical skills unavailable at the high school level. Conservatives, however, criticize the system, arguing that that the coefficient regulation for vocational schools is ideological, and aimed at decreasing the popularity of imam hatip schools by preventing their graduates from getting into university programs other than theology.

¶6. (C) Although the new regulation has not completely leveled the playing field for vocational students applying to university positions, the minimized coefficient penalty was warmly received by vocational school communities and conservatives. On the other hand, many secularists still argue that YOK's new decision is unconstitutional. Because

ANKARA 00001830 002 OF 002

vocational schools and general high schools have different curricula and are designed to address different needs of society, in their view, the coefficient "incentive" should have been kept in place. They urge that YOK's new coefficient regulation be overturned by the court again.

YOK's Commitment

¶7. (SBU) According to YOK's public statements, it was committed to end the coefficient "prejudice" against all "vocational high school graduates." YOK President Yusuf Ziya Ozcan said it anticipated the Court's rejection of its appeal by preparing other proposals to address the coefficient problem. Ozcan described the committee's possible options as: (a) introducing "elective" intensive religious classes to all state schools and merging imam hatip schools into regular schools, (b) minimizing the coefficient penalty for schools, including imam hatip schools, or (c) attaching some high schools to the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) specifically to train imams.

Comment

¶8. (C) Although YOK's final decision is more neutral than their previously announced plans, secular critics continue to claim that YOK's new coefficient system is mainly tailored for imam hatip students' needs under the vocational schools umbrella. This has heightened suspicions that YOK is no longer an autonomous body, but is instead easily influenced by the ruling AKP. Secularists claim that with YOK safely in hand, the AKP is now using the coefficient card to bring universities into its orbit. Conservatives, on the other hand, argue that the new regulation makes conditions for all vocational school students -- imam hatip school graduates included -- fairer, and that the YOK's new decision will not only increase the popularity of the imam hatip schools, but will also improve the future prospects of their graduates. The furor exceeds the potential impact on individual students, given that the university entrance exam (untouched by the coefficient) is still the main determinant for entrance into high education -- and only one-third of the

1.34 million students who take it manage to pass. Still, the YOK debate accentuates again the sizeable schism that now dominates the political landscape.

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